

Sankey Canal Restoration Society

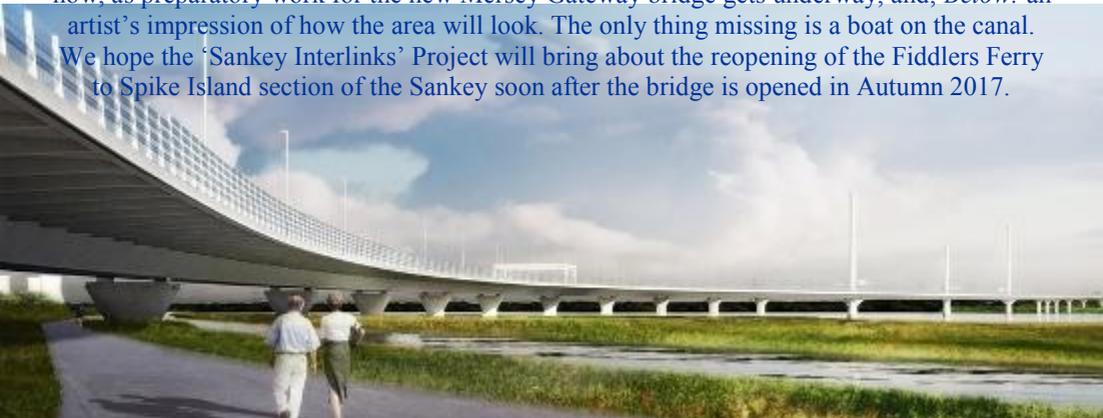
# CANAL CUTTINGS

VOLUME 8 Number 1  
Spring 2014



## Now... and When

A new twist to the “Then & Now” genre of photography: *Above*: the Sankey Canal as it is now, as preparatory work for the new Mersey Gateway bridge gets underway, and, *Below*: an artist’s impression of how the area will look. The only thing missing is a boat on the canal. We hope the ‘Sankey Interlinks’ Project will bring about the reopening of the Fiddlers Ferry to Spike Island section of the Sankey soon after the bridge is opened in Autumn 2017.



# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

Founded 1985

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Linda Dirir and Steve Parish (Warrington)  
Paul McQuade (St. Helens)

**The Inland Waterways Association:**

David Smallshaw and Colin Greenall (Chester & District Branch)  
David Jarvis (IWA NW Restoration Committee)

# Sankey Canal Restoration Society

## **CANAL CUTTINGS**

**VOLUME 8 NUMBER 1**

**Spring 2014**

**Editor and Production: David Long**



### **CONTENTS**

- 3. Chair's Report**
- 5. Round the Boroughs News**
- 8. SCARS Work Party Report**
- 11. A Voyage of the FERNDALE**
- 16. Wharf uncovered at Old Double Locks**
- Reports from our Talks Programme:**
  - 18 The Mersey Forest**
  - 19. Fred Dibnah**
  - 20. Lost Railway Stations of the NW**
  - 24. The Bridgewater Canal**
  - 28. IWA Restoration Report**
  - 32: Brian Bennett's Album: Part 6**

## ***Chairman's Report: From Dave Smallshaw***

As the evenings lengthen and the weather starts to improve, at least in temperature, we are hopeful that the coming summer will be something like last year and that the society will reap income from a number of venues we are attending in the months ahead.

Firstly let's deal with the immediate past and I am pleased to report that the Society had another successful AGM at the Friends Meeting House, St Helens. However, although all went well, we had no additions to our small band of executive council members at election time - but should I have expected anything else? There were a couple of hesitant members present so may I take this opportunity once again to mention that we can co-opt and being on the council need not take up too much of your time .....

At the AGM, news of the success of the Interlocks Partnership's bid for funding from The Coastal Communities Fund had already broken but it was nice to confirm to members that the fixed bridge at Fiddlers Ferry will now be replaced by a high quality moveable structure from the funding provided which, together with a further funding contribution from Warrington BC, will create not only a centre point for the redevelopment of the Sankey Canal corridor, but will also help to create more jobs in the immediate area. SCARS will play a direct role in the implementation and progress monitoring of the project.

As I said at the meeting, this news is arguably the most important announcement affecting the restoration of the waterway since the inception of the Society and this will, hopefully, provide a springboard for other funding opportunities to bring at least part of the Sankey back to meaningful navigation in the foreseeable future.

Another bit of excellent news came about the same time where Runcorn-based Ineos Chlor, formerly a part of the ICI group of yesteryear, had allocated £11,000 from their community funds to provide improved visitor facilities at Spike Island, Widnes. A heritage trail is to be created with new interpretation boards which will tell of the local industrial heritage and the way in which the canal played a part in its development. Way-marks will also be set up to guide visitors and we hope that more funds may be made available in the future to improve seating and other facilities.

Finally a truly excellent month or so was rounded off with news that the Inland Waterways Association had approved a grant from their legacy fund for a lockable container which we will site at Blackbrook. The container will store all our restoration equipment and tools, and also adequate storage for our publicity material and sales stocks. The container will need fitting out so any carpenters, handymen (or women) will be most welcome.....

We also mentioned at the meeting that our on-line bulletin, "Off cuts", had not yet surfaced and that composition of this had slipped a little owing to other commitments but, with our limited resources, we must follow opportunities as they arise and a promise of funds to provide a new website and DVD of the canal meant "Off Cuts" went on the back burner. The project is not by any means dormant and the launch will take place sometime soon. The new website is also imminent and anyone with even limited experience on matters technical who fancies lending a hand would be most welcome.

We have recently concluded our winter programme of social meetings and a series of guest speakers have provided interesting facts and fuelled lively comments to those attending. Sadly, however, the numbers doing so are well below previous years and low attendances are not only embarrassing for the organisers but also show the Society in a lesser light.

This is a good time, therefore, to review our future policy. Primarily we really feel that we need to provide some focus for members to meet socially. Whilst fully appreciating that society has radically changed its attitude to social events in the light of in-house entertainment and the like, we would like to get your thoughts on the way forward for the Society.

- Should we continue as at present?
- Should we meet in the afternoon or early evening to avoid travel at night?
- Should we amalgamate or align our speaker programme with other groups of like-minded enthusiasts?
- Should we scale down organised speakers to combine with a monthly social event / walk / visit from our Blackbrook base?
- Any other suggestions?

We will need to make a decision at our next executive meeting as speakers have to be booked well in advance so I would really appreciate your input and it will only take a few seconds to email me at [flatboat@aol.com](mailto:flatboat@aol.com) with your suggestions. By adding your voice to our deliberations you will greatly assist us in getting the right balance. Your comments in no way will bind you to support any new arrangement; we just want member participation in decision making.

I would really appreciate your ideas and if you are not on email then contact me by whatever way is convenient for you, the details are elsewhere in this issue.

Things are certainly happening at the moment and a busy time lies ahead. Spring is always a good time for optimism and there is certainly a lot of it around the Sankey Canal at the moment.

Kind Regards

# News Round-Up Around the Boroughs

by Colin Greenall

Everything seems to be going well on the Sankey at the moment as you will gather from my report this time, let's hope it continues.

## **Warrington**

### **“GOOD NEWS” Coastal Communities Grant for Fiddlers Ferry.**

Background to the project: The Coastal Communities Fund (CCF) aims to encourage the economic development of coastal communities in the UK by awarding funding to create sustainable economic growth and employment. Part of Warrington and Halton are classed under this programme as coastal communities due to their position in the Mersey Estuary, within the tidal zone. The area of Fiddlers Ferry and the Sankey Canal are part of this coastal area in Warrington.

The Project: The successful partnership funding bid was made by the two local authorities (Warrington and Halton) in conjunction with the Sankey Canal Restoration Society. The Grant awarded is for £654,000 and is in two parts: the Capital Element of £375,000 is for the new, wider, electrically-operated lift bridge which will replace the temporary bridge now in place at the site of the former Marsh House Swing Bridge; the rest of the funding will help support the existing businesses operating from the Riverside Trading Estate, Fiddlers Ferry Caravan Park and Sailing Club and The Marina and will create 2 direct jobs, up to 23 indirect jobs, offer 12 apprenticeships and 40 volunteering opportunities, and improve the canal environment. Work on the new bridge is scheduled to start in October

### **More work on Sustainable Transport Routes to Employment.**

Fiddlers Ferry to Johnson's lane crossing, and Newton Brook to Watery Lane (*below*): Work on these two sections is now almost complete



## Halton

**New Mersey Gateway Bridge - update:** Work has started on preparatory work for the construction of the new bridge across the Mersey. All the vegetation has been cleared from the off-side of the canal (*below*), east of the former railway swing bridge, the ground has been leveled, and marker posts put in place. The Sankey will be temporarily infilled at this point to allow an access track to be built across the marsh to the river, where coffer dams will be constructed midstream for the bridge's piers.

More about the bridge: <http://www.merseygateway.co.uk/> - from where the inset showing an artist's impression of the bridge, crossing the Sankey at an angle on the left is taken.



### “Sankey Interlocks Project” Linking the Locks

**Ineos Chlor Grant £11,424 for interpretation panels (Mersey Forest)** SCARS, with the assistance of Halton BC has been successful in obtaining funding to erect four interpretation panels around Spike Island. A second phase of this bid, for four benches and paving to accompany the panels, has been deferred until the next round of bids.

**Wren Bid - for lock gates** Halton BC, with the assistance of SCARS, is to submit an application to Wren Environmental for funding to repair the Lock gates at Spike Island. The work will involve minor repairs to the outer stop plank grooves, minor gate repairs, dredging the lock chamber and outer cill area, clearance of the sluice culverts and the fitting of all new operating mechanisms.

**Launch of DVD and website in May** The “Sankey Canal Interlocks” DVD will be launched at the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre in Widnes on Thursday 15th May. This project was made possible through the “Shared Heritage” scheme of HLF, which gave a grant of £7,500 to Penketh High School’s media department. The project involved pupils from Penketh High and West Bank Primary Schools, along with members of SCARS and the two local authorities, producing a DVD about the canal’s history, and the potential benefits a restored waterway would bring to the area.

## **St.Helens**

**SCARS Container** SCARS has received a grant from the IWA Lancashire Legacy Fund to purchase a 20' x 8' x 8'6" metal storage container to be use to store all our equipment. We have applied to St Helens MBC for Planning Consent to locate it at the Sankey Valley Heritage Centre at Blackbrook. The grant will be used to purchase and fit out the interior of the container.

**More work on Sustainable Transport Routes** The section of footpath /cycleway from Boardmans Lane to top of Old Double Locks is almost complete.

**New Bridge over the Old Double Locks** SCARS members have been consulting with St.Helens MBC over the design of the new bridge and it is hope the new structure will be installed later this year.

## **Events booked for our Sales & Display Stall**

### **Monday 26th May**

Willow Park Rural Craft Display  
- at Willow Park, Newton-le-Willows

### **Saturday & Sunday 7th & 8th June**

IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch, Waterways Festival,  
- at Tower Wharf, Chester

### **Saturday 2nd August**

Newton Town Show  
- at Mesnes Park, Newton-le-Willows

## **Appeal for Bric-a Brac, Books—and Customers**

As you can see, we already have a number of events to attend this year, and we are in need of things to sell at them. Please help by donating books and bric-a-brac. We are not allowed to sell electrical goods and don't want clothing of any kind.

If you have anything to offer please contact me, Colin Greenall, on 01744 731746 (evening) or 01744 732031 (daytime) or email me at [colin.greenall@btinternet.com](mailto:colin.greenall@btinternet.com)

We are always pleased to welcome SCARS Members at our stall at these events. Come along for a chat, to catch up with the latest news... and perhaps help swell our funds by buying an item or two.

## Reports From Our Work Party—By John Hughes

Work Parties were held on the 8th December and the 12th January at the top pound area by the Old Double Locks in Blackbrook, St Helens.

**Sunday December 8th 2013:** The car park behind the Heritage Centre on Blackbrook Road (A58) was our 10am meeting point for both days. Crossing back over the busy road and a stroll of approximately 350 yards took us again to our working area where the first task was to raise the Society's flag over the site.

Our main jobs entailed carrying on from the November's work party achievements in clearing the main waterway channel from obstructions with the help of grappling hooks and ropes and also cutting back the undergrowth at the banks of the canal. Further attempts to clear reeds and outlying branches from the water margins of the canal was achieved by the construction of "Time Team" style log and plank causeway into the centre of the water where the bold juggled their balance with slinging the grappling hooks further to the centre of the stream. Team leader, John Hughes, is seen here engaged in this delicate mission!



A break for food came and went quickly so, with the light beginning to fade and the cold getting into the aching muscles of the team, the last hour was spent litter picking and generally tidying up the site.

Four bin bags of various bits of rubbish were collected and nothing of any value gathered except the uncovering the long lost 1885 date stone located on the corner of the top lock stonework (*Opposite*) which made the day all worthwhile.

Once again the weather was very kind to us being dry and sunny for the main part. John thanked his fellow workers for their hard work and also the St Helens' ranger, John, for his assistance on the day.

**Sunday, January 12th 2014:** A lovely crisp sunny morning greeted us back on the same site, so it's up with the flag again. After the acrobatics of last time and with an appreciable rise in water level on the canal after heavy rain there was no "wet" work to be done and the team were glad to be back to "proper digging" again – the best sleeping pill on the market!



The uncovering of the 1885 date stone (*left*) during our previous visit, had fired our imaginations and, excited by the prospect of uncovering more secrets, we decided to look for more hidden coping stones.

Our plan was to dig a row of test holes to run in a line with the date stone to see what lay beneath the infill. We hit stonework when our first two holes were approximately 15" deep, but the third hole was only 6" deep when the coping was found. We then realised that this was a step down /step up section. Further extensive excavation found that the step up coping revealed a similar

1885 date stone to match our discovery of last month. More copings were subsequently uncovered on the shallow digging section and the length of the uncovered section crept back some distance and it appeared we were digging towards the town centre! (*Below*)



Time was ticking over now and a decision was taken to pull up the diggers and to concentrate on tidying up the site until next time. Some of the excavation spoil was used to back fill the copings on the previously cleared bank the other side of the locks and the rest was raked and spread out to even off the rough areas created by the dig.

The light started to fade and it was time to get back to the Heritage Centre and head off for our homes for a well earned brew and bath. Once again many thanks to all involved and thanks again to the St Helen's Ranger Service for their help and advice.

*Note on the above discoveries:* 1885 was the date for a large programme of rebuilding on the waterway as the date was well over 100 years from the first construction of the canal. The date stones probably marked the spill way for excess water at the reconstructed double locks. We have no pictures of this construction and no one can recall what the site was like before intensive infill occurred on this section of the canal when the adjoining playing fields and grassed area was created so if anyone can assist us in their recollections we would greatly appreciate it.

The next two months saw the team once again at the Blackbrook pound above the Old Double Locks on the Sundays of **February 9th and March 9th** where work continued. These Work Parties had three tasks to look at:

1. Uncover more of the line of the "dated" copings
2. Carry in with reed and willow clearance in the top pound
3. Hopefully find site of coal loading wharf shown on old maps

Task one was soon completed due to the sharp rise of the ground up to the level of the rugby playing fields.

Task two is a plodder of a job manually whereas a JCB could do the lot in a day! We keep chipping away and have made it more accessible for the fishing fraternity. We have certainly had lots of positive comments from passers by.

Task three was to find the loading wharf. After digging various test pits without any luck, Colin hit the jackpot. Twenty foot from the test pits nature had helped us ...all the heavy rain had washed the top soil off to leave a narrow dark strip. On inspection this turned out to be a section of a front buttress coping. (*See Colin's Report of this find, centre pages*)

On both days to finish off the site was tidied and made safe. Again my thanks are to all my fellow volunteers and to the ranger service for their continued support and hospitality

On both days the sun shone – hope I am not tempting fate!

Although work at Blackbrook could continue, we feel that it has received enough attention for the moment, and we are looking at other sites. Our band of volunteers is growing and we recently welcomed non-society community volunteers (*right*), but there is plenty of room for all. There are also jobs to suit all, and there is no need to get wet or dirty - although some seem to excel in getting just that! Come along and join us on the second Sunday of the month - you will be made most welcome and your efforts greatly appreciated.



# The Voyage of the Ferndale



*News that restoration work (see IWA Notes, page 28) is starting on the MOSSDALE (left) at Ellesmere Port Boat Museum reminded us that WATERWAYS WORLD published an article on a voyage by one of its sister flats, the FERNSDALE, in November 1993. It was compiled by Lynn Doylerush, the Boat Museum's Archivist, using the journal of the boat's skipper, John Joseph Abel. With their kind permission, the article is reproduced below.*

"It is a Monday morning in June. We are lying in South West Collingwood Dock, Liverpool. We, our barge Ferndale, which will carry eighty ton of grain at a draught of five feet; captain and mate, the crew of the barge."

So begins the narrative of John Joseph Abel (*right*) and the story of so many journeys made between the wars (there a record of him carrying grain in 1934 at the age of 28) and in subsequent years.

"Come ten o'clock, we go to the telephone for orders; ring town office at the cost of two pence. Orders received. Two barges, grain warehouses to load grain for North Shore Mills, Boundary, Liverpool, barge to Sandon Dock to carry raw materials to Borax factory above Runcorn locks. Ferndale to Alexandra Dock to load 60 ton of corn for Trafford Mills, Manchester."

The journey had many difficulties. The first was the problem for a dumb barge of getting through the dock system to get loaded and then back out to the Mersey. Boathooks were the main method of propulsion but there was always the chance of a tow from a passing tug. Camaraderie was strong. On this occasion they make a start with their boat-hooks, wait two hours for the lockmen to allow them into Nelson Dock and then their luck is in. First the skipper of a Rea tug towing coal barges helps them along and then an Alexandra Towing Company tug



is

whistles them along and lets them go with an impetus that takes them through Langton Dock Bridge as the obliging lockman opens the gate before they arrive. And so down the branch to the silo.

"I reported to the site foreman, who said, '60 ton of corn! Manchester! Right no 2 Shute, we will give it you right away, won't take long.' So back aboard, strip off the tarpaulins and start to load."

The loading takes best part of an hour and by 5.30 they are ready to make their way back through the locks towards the Mersey. They have a draught of 4ft 2in that will allow them to settle an inch in fresh water which they will encounter on the Bridgewater Canal between Runcorn and Manchester. To reach the Bridgewater they have to travel up the Mersey to Weston Mersey Lock which takes them into the Manchester Ship Canal close to Runcorn. Then they have to climb the flight of Runcorn ten locks.

Now, Captain Abel and his mate begin to make their way through the dock system to the mighty river Mersey. Their voyage begins in earnest. With the help of another tow they find themselves at Canada Lock waiting to join a group of barges to be towed out into the river and up the Mersey.

At Canada Lock there are several barges waiting to lock out, one with cotton bales for Manchester and another with copper bars for Preston Brook. The time is now 7.30pm. Locking out starts at four hours to high water. High tide is 1 a.m. so that means a 1 a.m. start which gives them time to have a good wash, a meal and a rest before starting on the next stage of their journey. It has taken them most of the day to get so far.

At 1 a.m. they lock down to river level to wait for their tow in Canada Basin. Eventually it arrives. "There are eight barges for our tug. We double up, four on the port side and four on the starboard. We all have our navigation lights burning, red on port and green on starboard and two ropes, one from each side at the bow on to the barge ahead. The tug is the MSC Dagmar, a paddle tug. She takes a tow rope from each of the two front barges and she hauls us all steadily at first out into the tideway and on our way."

On a June night in the heyday of the Mersey, travelling up past the Pierhead must have been a magical experience. A feast of lights viewed from a floating platform, with the river making soft murmurs, and the city asleep.

"The lights from Liverpool are on our port side and the lights of New Brighton on our starboard. Coming up to the Princess Landing Stage at the Pierhead and looking from mid-river we see the Cunard liner Scythia lying alongside the landing stage with all her lights aglow, just like a huge hotel. In mid-river we see the Reina del Pacifico, all lit up, waiting to be docked into Sandon Basin on the tide".

At this time of the morning there would not be the ferries crossing their path and presenting something of a hazard to traffic moving up and down the river.

"We are past the landing stage now with all the bright lights and our tug picks up another barge at Dukes Dock and we are on our way again. In time we leave all the lights behind us. On our starboard beam we can see in the distance the lights of Eastham. We continue up the river until we come to the Hale Head lighthouse."

At this point the Ferndale will cross the river to lock into the Manchester Ship Canal. It is here that the flatmen of John Joseph's era have it at least a little easier. Flats had sailed up the Mersey & Irwell Navigation from some two centuries earlier. Using tide and wind and teams of men called bankhaulers and later using horses when hauling paths were made, the early flats took up to a week to make the journey to Manchester. John Corbridge's Pictorial History of the Mersey & Irwell sets the scene. They carried grain

like the Ferndale and other cargoes, especially cotton which became the leading industry of the Industrial Revolution. John Joseph Abel was a flatmen in a long tradition.

The Ferndale is taken across the Mersey to Weston Mersey Lock.

"The time is now 5am and it is a lovely morning. The Dagmar leaves us now and has five barges to tow down the river for Birkenhead and Liverpool Docks on the ebb tide. The lockmen close the river gates behind all of us (nine barges in all) and raise the water in the lock to the level of the Manchester Ship Canal. All level and off we go again along the canal to Runcorn Dock Basin at the bottom of Runcorn Locks. We all follow, one after the other, until eventually we are at the top lock and enter the Bridgewater Canal." Runcorn Locks was a familiar route for the flatmen of Richard Abel's craft, as it was for many other small carriers on the Mersey. Richard Abel had started the firm in 1861. The Runcorn Register of Canal Boats records thirty-six boats registered in an Abel name before 1900. Richard took over the Castlerock Shipyard of Runcorn in 1890. His brother Joseph was a captain and some of his descendants, including John Joseph Abel who was his grandson, worked as boatmen. Richard and his descendants ran the company. Whenever they could they ended their boats with the name 'dale'. Despite many setbacks the firm prospered and was one of the last to go out of business.

They built the last wooden Mersey flat, the Ruth Bate, for their friendly rivals Wm Bate & Son. This vessel lies forlorn but proudly at Spike Island on the St Helens Canal, having been rescued and restored by the faith of Halton Borough Council and the inspiration of Jim Mac-Dougal. Two other Abel's craft, still in good shape, are the Oakdale, which is at the Maritime Museum in Liverpool, and the Mossdale, which is at the Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port. If you pick the right day you might even see an Abel shipwright, Reg Clarke, working on Mossdale.

Abels specialised in carrying sand and gravel and this they took up Runcorn Locks and elsewhere. In the thirties they supplied raw materials for tannery firms situated just above the locks and similarly for the Borax works. They also took bulk oil. Regular cargoes were also sugar and grain for Manchester. John Joseph Abel worked this route frequently.

"The toll officer checks our bill of lading, checks our draught, to make sure we are not over draught for the canal (4ft 3in), and we wait until our haul is complete. (A haul is four barges, which are towed by a small motor tug, recently converted from steam).

"It is now 9 o'clock in the morning. Our haul comprises, as well as ourselves, two barges with cotton bales and one with general cargo. After a bite to eat, we are all ready for the off. The tug takes our two ropes and we are about 25 yards behind, with the other barges spaced out at the same distance, all settle down. We have now about 37 miles of our most delightful countryside to traverse, before coming to Manchester."

It is interesting to note that within the rough exterior of a Mersey flatman there is a soul sensitive to the beauties of nature. It was a calling of the hardest kind. Long hours, extremes of temperature and very real danger at the lock-side on icy mornings or out on the estuary in a fierce ebb tide among shifting sandbanks. Starkey in Schooner Port maintains that Abels lost seventeen boats between 1900 and 1928. He does not say how many men.

"On past Astmoor and Highfield Tannery, through Sir Richard Brookes' Estate, with its lovely trees meeting overhead. Beautiful.

"We arrive at Preston Brook, where we find barges discharging cargoes into narrowboats for the Midlands. We turn to our left and from here we can see Norton Priory and the

ruins of Halton Castle on the hill. Then on we go to the lovely village of Moore."

It is now about 11 o'clock in the morning. Captain Abel takes over the steering from his mate who has been in control from Runcorn.

"Leaving Moore behind, we come to the most pleasant and nicest stretch of the Bridgewater Canal called Walton Lea, where the foliage of the trees forms a green tunnel with rhododendrons on either side of the canal and all manner of wild flowers are growing. On to Stockton Heath and through to Grappenhall, where they are building houses with quite large gardens backed on to the canal. Then to Thelwall and on to Lymm Bridge, where the cottages are right by the canal side, with the lovely gardens ablaze with colour from the variety of flowers."

The time is now about 2 in the afternoon – the mate takes over the tiller.

"We continue on our way and pass the Salt Works at Agden, over the raised canal at Bollington and on to Altrincham. Here we come to a more industrial part of the canal and a lot straighter, not so many turns as we have had previously. It is a pleasant afternoon and here and there we see anglers fishing in the canal. From here the journey is more or less straight. We are able to make better time."

The strange paradox of the boatman is that what appears to be a leisurely way of life is, in fact, nothing of the sort. Time is of the essence. To miss a tide on the river is a crime. To arrive a minute late where you are discharging is almost as bad, because another boat might take your turn, possibly the last of the day. So this better time they are making on a lock-free canal is most important. Can they get to Manchester on time?

"We arrive at Brookland Bridge at 4.30pm. We are nearing the end of our journey now. I am to take over the steering until we reach Hulme Stop, the end of the canal. It is a lot more industrial now as we reach Manchester. On our right we pass the Longford Road Gas Works and then we come to Waters Meeting, which is the connection from which the Leigh Branch of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal meets the Bridgewater Canal. On we go through the heart of Trafford Park and its works and warehouses. Eventually we arrive at Manchester about 6.30pm.

"The two barges carrying cotton berth at their wharves, ready to discharge their cotton for the various mills around Manchester and the barge with general cargo also berths. Ahead of us are the locks for the Rochdale Canal. We have now to work down the three locks at Hulme to get onto the River Irwell. After doing this, we are too late for the last tow of the day down into Manchester Docks. So my mate and I will have to pull our barge down the river to Pomona Docks to the Mill."

So time was against them. After their good fortune with tows in Liverpool Docks, they miss out at the end of the journey.

"It is about one and half miles, but with a small flow of water with us, we arrive at around 8.30pm (Tuesday).

After berthing under the elevator, we have a good solid meal and are quite ready for a good night's sleep." After two long working days and a working night they have a full night's rest.

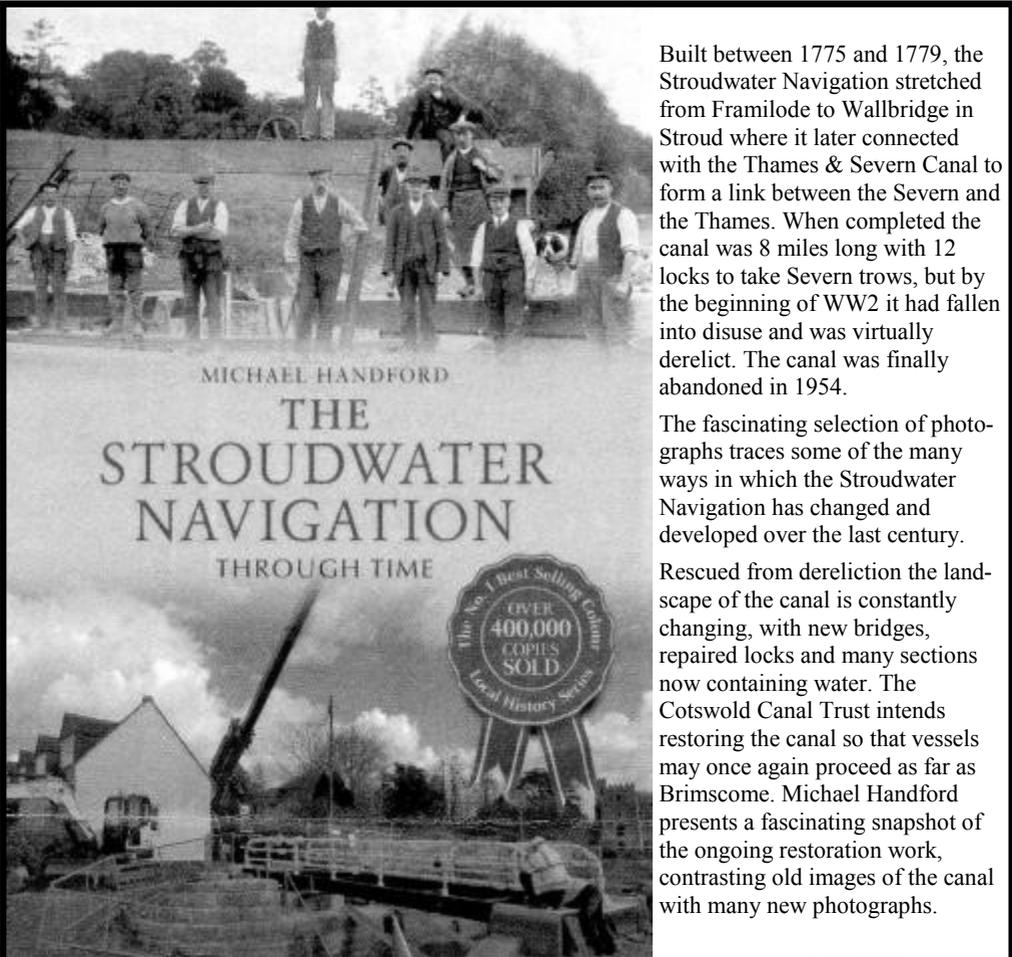
"Wednesday morning. We are up and about early for an 8am start to discharge. We strip off the tarpaulins, take off the hatches and berth her under the elevator, which will discharge our 60 ton of corn into the mill in about two hours. Finished discharging, we are now ready for another cargo."

And so the odyssey ends and shortly another will begin. It is a central fact that although the canals were so much more than a boatman and his mate making a journey, with a

vast organisation making it all possible, it was all directed towards this end. The journey was the one element that could not be missed out. The journal of Captain John Joseph Abel adds another chapter to an almost vanished way of life which can only in retrospect be appreciated as a unique experience involving difficulties and dangers enough to daunt an ordinary heart. It produced men and women with a special place in the story of industrial history.

Captain Abel concludes his narrative:

"I have described a cargo journey on the river and canal in the summer. But in the winter, with fog, snow and ice to contend with, well now, that is an entirely different story. This is a story of a barge and crew forty years ago when the canals were as busy as the roads are today with the advent of motor lorries. I suppose they thought their lorries were quicker than barge. So ended the era of canals for speed and some of the fine barges and bargemen had to look elsewhere for their livelihood."



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Built between 1775 and 1779, the Stroudwater Navigation stretched from Framilode to Wallbridge in Stroud where it later connected with the Thames & Severn Canal to form a link between the Severn and the Thames. When completed the canal was 8 miles long with 12 locks to take Severn trows, but by the beginning of WW2 it had fallen into disuse and was virtually derelict. The canal was finally abandoned in 1954.

The fascinating selection of photographs traces some of the many ways in which the Stroudwater Navigation has changed and developed over the last century.

Rescued from dereliction the landscape of the canal is constantly changing, with new bridges, repaired locks and many sections now containing water. The Cotswold Canal Trust intends restoring the canal so that vessels may once again proceed as far as Brimscome. Michael Handford presents a fascinating snapshot of the ongoing restoration work, contrasting old images of the canal with many new photographs.

# Work Party Finds At Blackbrook Colliery Wharf

## By Colin Greenall

During recent working parties at Blackbrook an interesting find was made - the Blackbrook Colliery Wharf was uncovered, hiding under years of vegetation growth (*below*).



The heavily constructed stone structure (*below*) lies opposite the top of the Old Double Locks.



Its discovery has thrown up a few mysteries. No trace of any tipping gear could be found in the stone blocks, but at one end two iron spikes protrude (*right*). They are approximately 12 inches high, and 12 inches apart, with various indentations in the stone-work around them. Nearby, another unusual feature we uncovered is the strange shaped “cleat”, (*below*) for want of a better word. Our assumption is that these are the remains of a wharf crane



or derrick. Was there ever a tippler on this site—or were the tram road waggons lifted by crane and their contents tipped into the boats? This may have been the case, for when the main line railway arrived, coal may have gone by rail from the colliery and therefore the wharf would have been out of use by the mid 1850s.

All this is speculation and if anyone can provide us with the right answers please let me know.

## WATERWAYS JOURNAL



**Volume 16**

Robert Aickman and '... the garish, Wild West melodrama of the campaign for the waterways'  
 Concrete Boats and Barges — Solutions for Wartime Steel Shortages  
 Box Boat No 337 — a rare survivor restored  
 Richard Abel & Sons, of Runcorn and Liverpool

### Fiddlers Ferry's Concrete Ships Feature in Boat Museum Journal

A picture from SCARS' archives adorns the cover of the latest issue of the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum's annual Journal, advertising an article within by our former Chairman, the Revd. David Long on the subject of concrete barges, two of which were built between the Sankey Canal and the Mersey in WW1.

Details: <http://www.boatmuseumsociety.org.uk/publications/>

# Reports from our Talks Programme *From Peter Keen*

## **The Mersey Forest and Green Infrastructure, by Tom Ferguson**

SCARS' 2013/ 14 Programme of Talks began in September with Mr Tom Ferguson, speaking on the above topic. Previously active in the Planning Department of St Helens MBC, he now devotes his time to the Mersey Forest Organisation which he helped to set up before his retirement.

He pointed out that in Britain, the word "forest" was originally applied to a hunting area reserved for the nobility. This was not just woodland however but also included moorland and heath. The Forest of Bowland and Sherwood Forest demonstrate these characteristics. The area covered by the Mersey Forest project includes Merseyside, Cheshire and Sefton, but not the Wirral. Its objectives are to work with partners to transform the landscape by the planting of trees, to manage neglected woodlands, to develop economic and social improvements and to achieve a woodland coverage of 20%.

So far over 9 million trees have been planted, which is well above the average for similar areas in the UK. Surveys indicate that 65% of those canvassed consider that their environment has been improved as a result of the planting. It has been calculated that for every £1 invested by the landowners involved, there will be an £8 return.

A small team based at Risley Moss, varying in number up to a maximum of 20, acts as a steering group, working with landowners, developing funding bids, dovetailing actions with other national groups, and providing guidance to any group requesting information on tree planting.

The 2001 scheme and its objectives were revised during 2013 to suit new circumstances.

*Who is involved within the area?:* Communities, Landowners, Bold Forest Park, Sefton Coastal Path.

*What is involved?:* Design and planting, Long Term management, Green Streets of Knowsley and Allotments.

*How to proceed:* Create Strategies and Policies; Apply for and Monitor Funding and Research.

*Why the Scheme should operate:* To improve the economy, to attract more tourism, to improve biodiversity and to contribute towards flood alleviation.

The relevance of the Mersey Forest Scheme to SCARS lies in the fact that the Sankey Valley is a priority area for tree planting.

The Green Infrastructure includes everything in the region's life support system and its system of natural environmental components within and between North West Settlements and the multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. The whole area has been mapped to identify the different land uses according to function, and sections can be identified for improvement.

Clearly the rural areas are more readily available for planting, mainly with indigenous species, but even within urban areas there is scope for planting. There is increasing use of trees along streets within towns, often of the ornamental types. Where houses have gardens the local authority has some control over front gardens but back gardens are the province of



house owners who may be persuaded to add trees. In fact it has been calculated that as much as 80% of the region can be classified as Green Infrastructure. The planting of trees has added £50M to the value of the region, promoting tourism, increasing opportunity for recreation, improving the economy, increasing the storage of carbon and water and improving property values.

It is intended to improve the corridor between Liverpool and Manchester alongside the Manchester Ship Canal where there is much potential for investment. If the planned funding is obtained from the private sector by 2030 it is anticipated that 250,000 new jobs will have been created. However there are political and regional differences to be discussed and acceptable conclusions agreed before this is realised.

### **Fred Dibnah : The Lost Years, by Nicholas Wilding**

When Fred Dibnah died nearly ten years ago, the world lost a character who had amused, entertained and educated large numbers of people simply by being himself. The BBC made a series of programmes of his exploits, touching on his job as a steeple-jack, his many practical skills, his deep interest in all strands of the Industrial Revolution and his love of all things steam driven.

There were, however, many aspects of his life which were not featured, and Mr. Nicholas Wilding, a film maker, determined to remedy the situation by making a series of films about Fred which would show the real man, away from the formal programme presenter which he had become during the latter part of his career.

The series takes the form of a number of films showing Fred at work and at leisure in previously unseen footage, interspersed with extracts from an interview with Sheila, Fred's third wife.

At our October meeting SCARS members were shown the first film of the series.

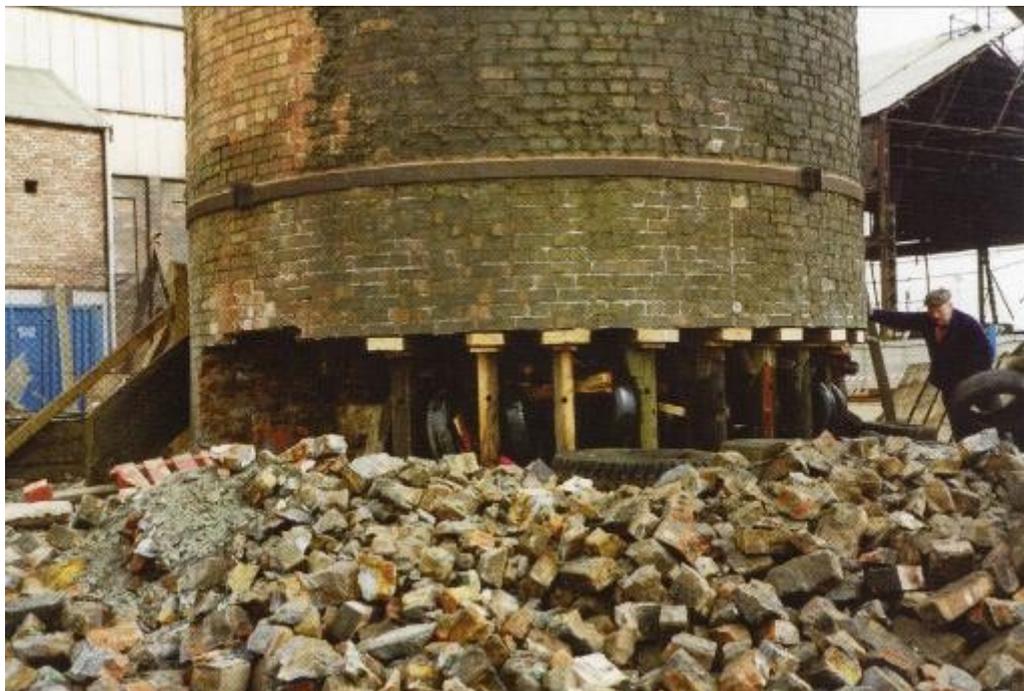
It followed the felling of a Barnoldswick chimney which was the 90th tackled by Fred over a 35 year career and was to be his last. The job was being fitted into a gap in his busy schedule of filming his "Made in Britain" tour of the British Isles, and his illness was already quite advanced.

Nicholas explained that his first meeting with Fred had been at the chimney felling at Bancroft Mill prior to filming the steeplejack at work. No scaffolding had yet been erected round the chimney top for the camera man, but they both climbed up the ladders to the top, where Nicholas was happy to wait for two-and-a-half hours until the staging was erected. It would have been too much effort to climb down to ground level then back up again once everything was ready.

Fred's chimney felling method had become familiar to his many fans. No explosives, just hard graft, cutting away the base of the chimney, often many bricks thick, supporting it on sections of telegraph poles, then burning them away in the time-honoured fashion to permit a controlled fall in a safe direction.

The chimney in the film was the last survivor in the town which, along with many East Lancashire towns, had possessed large numbers of similar structures. In the past, when the mills closed down for Wakes Week, usually the whole of the town would go off on holiday to the seaside, leaving the maintenance men to overhaul the mill machinery and sweep the flues and chimneys. In this case, those responsible for chimney cleaning had skimped on their work leaving a 3 metre layer of soot at the chimney base. This would have prevented a through draught when the fire was set so it had to be raked out, a far from pleasant task. Fred was assisted at the site by his younger son Roger who was shown, soot raking and tapping the timber props to ensure that they were in fact supporting the weight of the chimney. Holes

were drilled in some of the props, more in the parts where a fast burn was required and fewer where a slow burn was needed. Many years of experience had taught Fred (*below*) where drilling was or not required.



Old timber was piled up around the props and chimney base, liberally soaked in used diesel oil, then the ceremonial lighting up took place, traditionally carried out by Mrs Dibnah, in this case Sheila. Once the fire was set there could be an interval of 20/30 minutes until the supports were burned away, allowing the chimney to fall. There were many spectators at the chimney felling, and such was their confidence in Fred's ability that they were reluctant to withdraw to safer areas without repeated urgings.

The mill which had occupied the site had been previously demolished and the chimney was the last surviving structure to be removed before 48 new houses could be built.

### **Lost Railway Termini of North West England, by Paul Wright**

In November the Society was happy finally to welcome Mr Paul Wright, who had had to cancel a previous visit owing to ill health. The closure of branch line stations and those on main lines which are not earning their keep has become a familiar feature in Britain's railway history but it is surprising how many major termini have disappeared over a short space of time.

Railway stations were a childhood interest of Paul's which, following a delve into the internet in 2005, developed rapidly. Then there were 15 stations mentioned as having been closed but now there are 1,882 nationwide. When he was approached by Silverlink Books about a possible book of photographs his problem was how to choose from the wide selection. The answer was to go for the termini and the result was, "Lost Railway Termini of the North West".



Paul's presentation began with **Crown Street Station**, (*above*) Open 1830, closed to passengers 1836, final closure 1972. This was the original western terminus of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway. ( ). From here passengers and goods would have been taken onward into Liverpool by horse-drawn omnibus and cart. No locomotives used this station because of the steep approach incline, so coaches reached it from the Moorish Arch by cable haulage. Crown Street soon proved to be inadequate, so a new station was built at Lime Street in 1836, linked via a tunnel. This was horse-hauled initially but later was cable operated. The station was demolished in 1964 but the tunnel survives and the large brick air vents on the surface form solid reminders of what lies beneath.

**Liverpool Exchange Station** Open 1850, closed to passengers 1977 was shared between the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway and the East Lancashire Railway. The companies' separate platforms within the station were no problem, but the shared double tracks beyond the station throat caused many disputes. However traffic was so great that the station had to be enlarged up to ten platforms, some of which eventually served the electric services to Southport and Ormskirk. Initially elevated to give clearance to vessels on the Leeds Liverpool Canal, later developments in the city necessitated the closure of the station and the lines plunged below ground level to the new stations on the underground Loop system. The site of the train shed has been developed but the façade survives as a frontage to offices.

**Brunswick Station** Opened 1864, closed to passengers 1874, final closure 1970. Situated alongside Brunswick Dock, this was the terminus of the Liverpool to Garston Line linking the docks at those locations. ( ) Run by the Cheshire Lines Committee it was administered on similar lines to the St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway. It soon proved to be inadequate for the volume of passenger traffic so the line was extended northwards into Liverpool whilst Brunswick became a goods depot. It revived briefly during the 1911 Transport Workers Strike when military personnel disembarked here before moving northwards into the city. The building survived until demolition in the late 1960s.

**Liverpool Central Station** (high level) lasted from 1874 to 1972. A latecomer to the city, the train shed occupied a cramped site accessible only via tunnels. It was the main office of the Cheshire Lines Committee. A regular hourly service to Manchester was provided, taking 40 minutes, the fastest of all the routes linking the two towns.

Paul explained that the CLC never owned its own rolling stock but would lease locos and



coaches from other railway companies. The station was a very busy location, (*thought not when pictured, above*) catering at one stage for boat trains carrying East European emigrants en route to their new homes in America.

Although the CLC was not scheduled for closure under the Beeching Report, it nevertheless recommended that trains be diverted to Lime Street Station. This proposal brought so many objections from the passengers who used the line between Gatacre and the city centre that a line was especially kept open for them, the rest of the station area being turned into car parking space. Eventually the development of the Loop and Link meant that the same service could be provided from the low level platforms and the surface station was demolished. The platforms at low level obviously receive no daylight and tend to be rather gloomy, but the station is one of the busiest in the UK outside London.

**Liverpool Riverside** 1895-1971. This station was owned and developed by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board to service the liners on the transatlantic passenger trade. Trains left the main line to the north of the city centre then used track alongside the main dock road before entering the dock estate and negotiating a tortuous route along various quays to reach the station, located immediately alongside the landing stages. Trains progressed at walking pace, initially hauled by small tank locomotives because of weight restrictions on some of the dockland bridges, but later by main line locomotives after the bridges were strengthened. Over a million men passed through Riverside during WW2, many of them American servicemen. Dockside tracks were of the tram type with a sunken groove for wheel flanges and flat areas on either side, all set into the cobbles which had originally been installed to give horses a good foothold whilst hauling materials around the docks. WW2, the growth of air travel and the decline of the big ship traveller saw the station's decline and eventual demolition.

**Garston Dock** 1852-1947. The Spike Island site of the St Helens Canal and Railway Company proved to be inadequate so the line was extended to Garston where a vast array of sidings were built along with coal drops to load directly into waiting ships, allowing a great increase in productivity. A passenger terminus was provided but this was superseded in 1864 when the Liverpool to Garston line was opened, converting the terminus into a through station. The site of the station now lies beneath the Garston By-pass.

**Canada Dock** 1870 -1982. Alongside the northern dock of that name, the station was very badly damaged during WW2. Although its passenger provision consisted of only a single platform, its extensive goods facilities made it a prime target. By 1990 all traces had disappeared.

**Huskisson Dock** 1880-1975. Another CLC station, it lay only four miles from the city centre, but to access the company's southern lines trains had to travel in a loop around the city for 20 miles. Unsurprisingly, the passenger service lasted only five years before being withdrawn. Goods facilities continued in use until the 1970s but no trace remains today.

**Alexander Dock** 1881-1967. This was an LNWR property located to the west of Regent Road. Its site has been incorporated into the present dock estate and its tracks remain in use.

**Dingle** 1896-1956 One of the strangest of stations. It was the terminus of the Liverpool Overhead Railway but was located deep underground at the southern end of the docks, accessed via a girder bridge crossing the sidings of the dock railway. In 1901 a fire broke out in one of the coaches in the station and was blown along the train by the prevailing wind. All passengers were safely evacuated from the train but unfortunately a number of them, along with railway staff, were asphyxiated when they stood viewing the fire instead of leaving the station. The tunnel containing the station still survives, having been used for some years as a garage. A roof collapse in 2012 has put the buildings on the surface above at risk and arguments continue regarding responsibility and insurance cover.

**Southport Central** 1882-1973 Initially run by the West Lancashire Railway it passed to the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway in 1901. It lay to the east of the L&Y Chapel Street Station and was therefore a superfluous duplicate so was closed to passengers although active as a goods facility until closure in 1973.

**Southport Lord Street** 1884-1952. Run by the Southport and Cheshire Lines Committee, it accessed the town from the south, terminating in its shed at right-angles to Lord Street. In common with other coastal resort towns, Southport received large numbers of excursion trains bringing thousands of summer visitors. The winter months however saw many fewer passengers. The increase in car ownership after WW2 meant that Southport had excess railway capacity, leading to the closure of the station. The premises became a bus station for Ribble Buses until deregulation saw the demise of that company. It is now occupied by a supermarket although the façade has been retained as part of a hotel chain.

Paul then went on to give information regarding stations in the St Helens area and along the Runcorn Gap Railway's course, beginning with the first station in **St Helens (1)** 1833-1849, located to the south of the Friends' Meeting House. Local people had lobbied for a passenger connection to the Liverpool to Manchester Line and to Runcorn. At the time the latter journey would take 20 minutes, though the greatest use of the line was coal trains to Spike Island. The station was cramped, so a new station was established a short distance away, **St Helens (2)**, 1849-1871 allowing more operating opportunity. **St Helens Central (1)** 1900-1965 Setup by a combination of the Liverpool and St Helens Railway and the South Lancashire Railway, it lay on an elevated site between Central Street and Birchley Street with a small frontage on Corporation Street. The line gave access to Glazebrook and the many collieries between there and St Helens. It had been intended to extend the line westwards to Liverpool but this was never achieved. The station was closed to passengers in 1952 and its goods provision ceased in 1965.

Paul rounded off his presentation by talking about his "Disused Railway Stations" website, an ongoing work, constantly revised, as more stations are added to it, and also about the website of the 8D association, which covers the South Lancashire area. An excellent talk, informative and entertaining, and SCARS is grateful to Paul for his time and enthusiasm.

## **The Bridgewater Canal by David George**

The 2014 programme kicked off in January with an illustrated talk on the original line of the Bridgewater Canal between Worsley and Trafford, concentrating upon the canal-side architecture and its history. Our speaker, Mr. David George, is not a member of a canal society, but simply developed an interest in the canal since moving to Worsley some years ago.

The first illustration was of Worsley Old Hall, a splendid half timbered building recently renovated on the outside. It has seen a number of changes over the years from Coal Board Office to Medieval Banqueting Hall to its present use as a popular restaurant, but its main claim to fame lay in the fact that it was here that Francis Egerton the 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, John Gilbert and James Brindley planned the construction of the canal.

In the face of opposition from the proprietors of the Mersey and Irwell Navigation the necessary Act was passed in 1759 and work commenced to “make a navigable cut or canal” from Worsley to a terminus in Salford, following the northern bank of the River Irwell. In 1760 however there was a change of plan which meant carrying the canal across the Irwell on a stone aqueduct to the south bank then eastwards into Manchester, terminating at Castlefields.

The purpose of the canal was to provide efficient and cheap transport for the coal from the Duke’s mines at Worsley, road transport at the time being difficult and expensive. David’s next slide showed Worsley Delph, originally a quarry, where the entrance and exit tunnels of the mine were located, together with the loading wharf at which coal was transferred, in container boxes, from the mine boats (m-boats) into larger canal boats for the journey into Manchester.

50+ miles of linking tunnels stretched for many miles underground allowing coal to be cut at the coal face, loaded aboard and taken to market with the minimum of handling. The photo showed one of a series of sluice gates which was used to propel the loaded m-boats out of the mine into the transshipment area. Empty boats were hauled back into the mine by man power, boat crews using ceiling hooks and harnesses. The channels served the dual purpose of transport and draining the large volume of water which constantly entered the workings. There are occasional inspections of the tunnels but headroom is increasingly limited as the silt builds up. It is unlikely that the public will be allowed to view them for this reason. The delph has been neglected until recently but there are plans to make it more pleasant and accessible to the public.

By 1880 the coal at Worsley was no longer as easy or cheap to mine, newer methods in other parts of the coalfield were more efficient, so mining ceased, the m-boats being lined up in the delph with no further use planned. It was at this point that they became known as ‘starvationers’ since the unloaded boat displayed the ribs joining their side walls to the bottom boards. Coal was still being carried along the canal however from the Wigan and Leigh pits via the Leigh branch to power stations at Barton, Stretford and Manchester. David’s next slide was one of the most recognised location on the canal, the Packet House. Located a short distance from the delph, this building was provided for the passengers who were to use the packet boats, passenger carrying vessels which conveyed the early commuters into the Manchester city centre. The original building is of brick, containing the booking hall and waiting room, whilst the more spectacular half timbered section is much later and has been converted into apartments. Leading down to the canal and waiting boats were the steep flight of steps which remained in use for the passengers up to the end of WW1. Even today boat trips can be taken from the steps along the canal. (*Opposite*)



The next building illustrated looked rather odd. The walls were heavily buttressed and there were various doors on one gable end but no doors, windows or other openings on any of the other walls. This proved to be the warehouse for storing blasting powder and oil for use in the mines and was built without windows and with a metal framework to help contain any explosion which may occur. This building has been converted into waterside apartments by the current owners, Peel Holdings.

When the Bridgewater line died out in 1840 the estate was inherited by the 4th Earl of Ellesmere, a nephew of the deceased Duke. The Earl built Worsley New Hall on the Leigh Road and his own crenelated boathouse on the canal, close by the powder warehouse. He mixed with the aristocracy and royalty and in 1851 hosted a visit from Queen Victoria who arrived by rail at Patricroft then was brought by the Earl's private barge into Worsley before completing her journey by road. The barge was well used since the Earl had relatives at Tatton Park and frequent visits were made between family members since by this time the canal had been extended through Cheshire to Runcorn.

Next came a pair of dry docks, originally open but now roofed in to allow work in all weathers in the present boat builders and repairers yard.. The docks are drained via a circular shaft leading the water into Worsley brook which flows conveniently nearby. Behind the dry docks is Worsley Green, an area once occupied by the canal/mine workshops which produced everything from complete m-boats to the smallest casting needed in the mines. When the workshops were moved to Walkden in 1900, the buildings were all demolished apart from the furnace chimney which was refurbished as a monument to the Duke.

The next building shown was originally Worsley Mill. Grain would have been brought here from the wider area for milling and the centre section shows all the hall marks of a mill building, the multiple floors and roofed hoisting equipment. Two wings were added at a later date, a workshop and a forge, power being produced by a waterwheel driven by the brook. Today the building consists of office space although the hoist has been retained as a historical feature.

Much has been written about the aqueduct carrying the canal over the Irwell. As Brindley disliked the use of locks, he determined to carry the canal over the Irwell via an aqueduct. The original was built of stone and was considered a wonder of the waterways at the time. With the building of the Manchester Ship Canal the bridge stonework became an obstacle and a replacement was needed which would allow the passage of large sea going vessels.



The stone structure (*above*) was therefore demolished ,although one of its arches was rebuilt on the Eccles side of the river, to be replaced by yet another wonder, Barton Swing Aqueduct. A unique structure, the aqueduct consists of a large trough of water, connecting the canal across the MSC, which can be swung aside to allow the passage of large vessels. Designed by Eric Leader Williams the Chief Engineer of the MSC, it was opened in 1894. There is a central island in the MSC acting as an axis for the aqueduct , also housing the hydraulic and steam mechanism by which it was rotated. The tall control tower is also sited on the island, giving a clear view of the MSC in both directions to warn the bridge-keeper of approaching shipping. Water is retained in the trough and in the two stub ends of the canal by rubber sealed gates. Currently there is little traffic on the MSC but the aqueduct is rotated at dawn and dusk as part of its regular maintenance programme.

In the days of horse haulage on the canal the aqueduct was provided with approach ramps on either bank of the MSC and a tow path fixed to the girder work elevated above the water level . It is little wonder that blinkers were used on the horses using this vertigo-promoting tow path. With the development of steam and later diesel engines there was no further need for the tow path and it was removed.

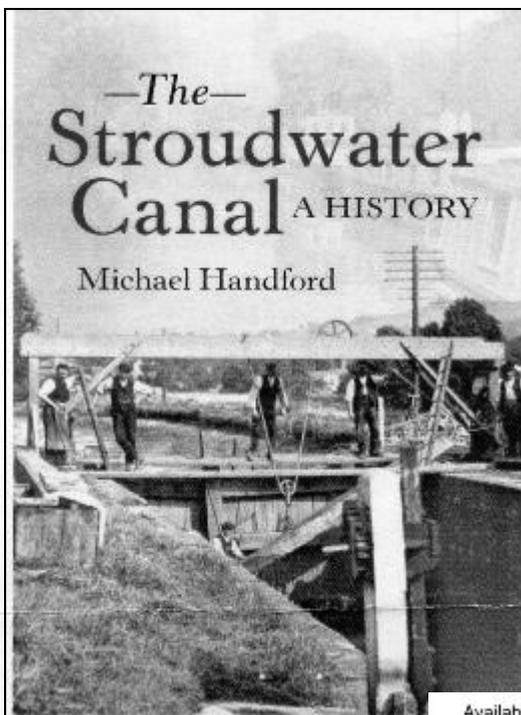
Boats were shown moored alongside Barton Power Station, serviced by the canal. It was originally built with fairly short chimneys but local pressure resulted in them being extended higher to carry the smoke away, but with limited success. It is this pollution which is blamed for the fact that the nearby Barton Aerodrome was never developed.

The last commercial users of the Bridgewater Canal, in the late 1960s, were the grain boats, the Barmere amongst them, which loaded loose grain at Manchester Docks then carried it via Hulme Locks along the canal to the Kelloggs cereal factory in Trafford Park.

Rounding off his talk, David returned to the Mines at Worsley Delph, explaining that there were three levels of tunnels within the mine, serving the various branches to the working coal face. These were not all the same size but varied according to the thickness of the seams. Boats which needed to be moved between levels were lowered on cradles running down rails laid along inclined planes to reach the mine exit at the lowest level. Tunnels were dug northwards towards Bolton, west to Boothstown and eastwards parallel to the East Lancashire Road. The use of flooded tunnels to transport materials from mines is not unique to Worsley, they were used in slate quarries, and lead mines, but there were few serving coal mines.

And what of the Duke? Having had difficult relationships with women, he never married so that on his death in 1801 there was no direct heir. Even in death he managed to retain some measure of control over the estate since his Will directed that it should be managed by a board of trustees for "as long as the lives of the House of Lords". It was 1840 before his nephew was able to claim his inheritance, but his title was 1st Earl of Ellesmere since the Dukedom title had lapsed. Amongst the Dukes effects were the packing cases containing statuary and mementoes which he had collected during his Grand Tour of Europe many decades earlier and never unpacked.

This was a canal talk with a difference, concentrating more upon the architecture along its banks and their relevance to the life of the canal.



The Stroudwater Navigation holds a unique place in the fascinating history of Britain's canal network. First planned in 1729, it was one of the oldest canal schemes, predating the Bridgewater Canal by a generation. In continuous ownership of the Company of Proprietors of the Stroudwater Navigation it is also the oldest canal company in the world. With the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1750, the canal can also lay claim to the first use of a canal as a leisure resource in the world too.

From the building of Blunder Lock, deliberately at the wrong level, to the Battle of Carter's Close, where locals would infill the canal at night as the contractors dug it out by day, Michael Handford tells the story of the Stroudwater in this new edition of his classic work on the canal.

Much has happened on the canal since the book was first published, and it is now being restored to its former glory, when it will again break records as a unique survivor of the canal age.

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## IWA Restoration Reports

*The following items are taken from the IWA head office bulletins of the last few months. The Association's monthly Bulletin, produced by IWA Head Office, contains all the latest news on issues affecting the waterways, both nationally and locally, plus a summary of current consultations etc. The bulletins form a veritable mine of information for all enthusiasts, and members can get current and back issues by accessing the IWA website.*

The new year brought in great news for enthusiasts of the historic river and canal craft of the Mersey ...

### **Mersey Flat Craned Out for Conservation**

A rare barge has been craned out of the water, ahead of its planned conservation.

MOSSDALE is one of the last surviving, all-wooden wide Mersey 'flats', a type of barge which was once a common sight across the North West with history dating back 150 years. Volunteers and staff from Canal & River Trust's National Waterways Museum will be carrying out conservation work, with the help of the Heritage Lottery Fund, to save the historic vessel.

MOSSDALE would originally have been carrying cargoes such as iron, flour and grain along the Bridgewater Canal as far as Manchester and across the Mersey between Ellesmere Port and Liverpool. She was built c.1863 of oak, elm and pitch pine. Originally named RUBY, she was renamed MOSSDALE when Abel & Sons of Runcorn, Cheshire, bought her in the 1930s. They extensively rebuilt and deepened her to obtain the maximum load for a minimum displacement. At one time, Mersey Flats were to be seen trading in their hundreds, not only on the Mersey but along the adjacent coastline, connecting canals and other inland waterways. Originally worked under sail alone, steam power and finally diesel engines were gradually fitted. Over time, rail and then lorries took away their trade, and their numbers diminished; now MOSSDALE and OAKDALE survive as the only two remaining examples. The boat was donated to the National Waterways Museum by Peter Froud in the 1970s and has been cared for by staff and volunteers. In June 2012, a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid for £147,300 meant the Museum could start preparations for the conservation by lifting MOSSDALE from the water (*below*),



Various branches of the Inland Waterways Association are combining with Canal & River Trust local volunteers to clean up sections of the main canal network and locally the Chester and Merseyside branch have been in action in Chester and Bootle. Other branches are active too...

### **Students Join IWA Manchester Branch Work Party**

IWA Manchester Branch and the local CRT Towpath Taskforce combined for a work party in February. Action was at the site of Bridge 15 on the Manchester and Bolton and Bury Canal, a canal under restoration and as such has a well used towpath. This footfall, coupled with the recent prolonged rainfall has led to a deeply pooled mud-bath, and the plan was to reinstate this towpath with some six tons of stone. CRT's Hazel Mayow had managed to source a stone with high grit content, hoping that this would help to bond the surface. The combined group were pleased to welcome a group of 12 students from The University of Manchester's Student Development & Community Engagement Division and over the fine sunny day some five tons of stone was laid.

### **IWA Lichfield Branch 2013 Work Party Report**

The branch logged more than 700 volunteer hours on the Trent & Mersey Canal in 2013, about double the hours of 2012. Over the year the Branch and volunteers renovated and widened the path from Wolseley Road, made improvements at Brindley Bank, began to restore the old tramway, restored the pathway at the bottom of the 'Bloody Steps', began work at the canal bank on St Augustine's Field, maintained and kept tidy the new visitor moorings at Brindley Bank, and two branch volunteers are now fully authorised to use CRT strimmers.

Plans for work to be carried out during 2014 are being developed and several jobs have already been identified. Old British Waterways signs need to be replaced, access at Leathermill Lane needs to be improved and work on the canal wall and towpath at Brindley Bank needs to be continued.

### **Cheshire Locks Work Party - Saturday 18th January**

North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch of the IWA and the Trent & Mersey Canal Society met in January for a further work party at Malkins Bank on the Cheshire Lock flight of the Trent & Mersey Canal. It was a mild day, but the threat of rain prevented any painting being carried out. Instead, the team concentrated on exposing the cobbles at Malkins Bank locks 63 & 64. All eight bottom gate quadrants (both locks being paired) were exposed, although there is more work to be done on the towpath ramp below lock 64 and future work parties will accommodate completion at the site.

Other restoration activity on the northern waterways...

### **Sun Shines on WRG Volunteers Working on the Pocklington Canal**

Spring arrived on the Pocklington Canal for the Waterway recovery Group (WRG) North West volunteers over the weekend of the 8th March. Sixteen volunteers from WRG North West worked alongside two members of WRG's Forestry team and spent the weekend clearing vegetation on the offside of the canal at Bridge 8. The aim of the tree clearance work was to improve light quality along the canal corridor, supporting the work of Natural England who are actively trying to manage tree growth along the canal.

Over the weekend volunteers were interviewed by the local community radio station, Vixen101, which gave them an opportunity to promote WRG's canal restoration work and explain how to become a dirty weekender!

WRG plans to return in the summer, holding a Canal Camp on the Pocklington Canal and Driffield Navigation, from the 16th-23rd August. The plan for the camp is for volunteers to improve the towpath on the Pocklington Canal, and to start construction of a new nature trail on the Driffield Navigation. It is hoped that the towpath works will create an amenity for the local community and improve access along the line of the two canals.

### **Caldon Canal Work**

After such a wet winter, volunteers from IWA North Staffordshire & South Cheshire Branch and Caldon & Uttoxeter Canal Trust were greeted with warm spring sunshine when they returned to Froghall Basin on the Caldon Canal for their annual clean-up work party. Eight willing volunteers spent the day clearing paths of vegetation along both the towpath and around the basin. In addition, a large quantity of rubbish, which had been fly tipped along the towpath near the tunnel was also gathered up for removal.

The volunteers then turned their hand to hedge planting making the most of the short time left for such activity. Some 300 hedging plants of various varieties were planted along the towpath from the tunnel entrance back towards the basin itself.

During the day, media students from the University of Staffordshire joined the work party to film some of the volunteers at work and to interview them on just what volunteering meant to them and why it is important that we encourage volunteers to work with us on the canal network.

At the end of the day, it was good to look at the work done and to thank to all the volunteers for their hard work.

And finally, nearer to home.....

### **IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch Continue to Clean-up Ahead of National Campaign Festival**

In March, following a sharp frost, the day cleared and with a lovely blue sky and no wind, it became very warm as the morning wore on. Four volunteers with IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch cleaned and repainted the railings on the bank of the Dee Branch of the Shropshire Union Canal by Williams' Moorings and others took on the task of clearing years of mud and weed debris from the edging stones around the basin, on the side by Telford's Wharf pub.

Mooring rings were found underneath the weeds and the edging looks much better, although there is still much more to be done. The aim is to have edging all clear in time for the waterways Campaign Festival in early June.

Later some volunteers undertook the inevitable litter pick again. However, the message may be getting through as the area now looks much improved.

**This is a programme of work around the Chester Canal basin and the whole area is now looking in prime condition for the IWA Waterways Campaign Rally on the first weekend in June. The SCARS promotional and sales team will be there, along with over a hundred canal craft of all shapes and sizes and various other attractions – so come along to this free event and support the work done by local waterway volunteers!**

**More details in the advertisement opposite.**



North West Region

## IWA NORTH WEST REGION SUMMER SOCIAL MEETING

Castlefield, Manchester - Saturday, June 21, 2014



Venue: Manchester YHA, Potato Wharf, Castlefield Basin M3 4NB

Cost, including buffet lunch - £10 per person

Following on from the successful 'Not an AGM' gathering at Fiddlers Ferry in 2013, you are invited to come to Manchester to explore Castlefield Basin and the Rochdale Nine locks in the heart of Manchester, learn about Manchester's hidden underground canal, the Manchester and Salford Junction Canal, and of course meet and socialise with your friends from the other branches in the region.

### Programme

- 10.00 Arrive and meet up
- 10.30 Tea/Coffee and introduction to the morning walk
- 11.00 Guided walk up the Rochdale Nine through the heart of Manchester including the Bridgewater Hall arm that was the original entrance to the Manchester & Salford Junction Canal and a chance to comment on the area of the proposed towpath gates at Rodwell Tower
- 1.00 Buffet Lunch
- 2.00 Presentation of Region Awards and Q&A/ Discussion period
- 2.30 'The Manchester and Salford Junction Canal.' An informal talk on the campaign to save the canal, albeit as a Grade 2 Listed WW II air raid shelter
- 3.30 - 4.00 Close and leave for home

We need to know numbers in advance for catering so please contact:

Alan Platt: [alanplatt@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:alanplatt@hotmail.co.uk) 01352 720649 or

Steve Connolly: [steveconnolly@btinternet.com](mailto:steveconnolly@btinternet.com) 01942 679310

Directions and parking locations (at a modest cost) will be forwarded when booking

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Chester & Merseyside Branch  
are delighted to be hosting IWA's National Campaign Festival

# Waterways Festival

at Tower Wharf in Chester  
7 & 8th June 2014



Chester Basin during our July in 2010

**FREE ANGLING TACKLE SESSIONS (Saturday)**

**FREE BOAT TRIPS**

**RAF HURRICANE Flypast On Saturday**

**GRAND DRAW**  
with Amazing prizes

**Live Music & Entertainment**  
**Children's WOW activities**  
**Historic craft Trade stands**

**Free Entry**

**FUN PET SHOW**  
On Sunday

[www.waterways.org.uk](http://www.waterways.org.uk) (National Campaign Festival)  
For information email [lesley.taylor@waterways.org.uk](mailto:lesley.taylor@waterways.org.uk)

### WHY IS IT A CAMPAIGN FESTIVAL?

The One Arm branch which goes down into the River Dee is neglected and the River Lock also needs repair. Our aim is to push for repair of the lock and help create a cruising route onto the Dee above the Weir.



## Brian Bennett's Album: Part 6

Long-time SCARS Member Brian Bennett has kindly donated his Album of photographs from the mid- and late 1970s.



Brian's archive spans the period when official vandalism filled much of the Sankey with rubbish—including the unique, historic crossing of England's first true canal by the world's first inter-city railway at Earlestown. *Above* is the section from the viaduct towards the Sankey Sugar Works in 1979, after it was infilled and landscaped.

The *inset* (already seen in CUTTINGS 7.08) shows the scene in 1975.

*Below*: The view in 1979 from the opposite quarter.

